

Officials discuss ways to increase tourism

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DuBOIS — Area tourism officials and county commissioners met Wednesday afternoon at the DuBois Holiday Inn with U.S. Rep. John Peterson, R-Pleasantville, and state tourism officials to discuss a regional marketing plan to increase tourism in the area.

DuBois

The regional plan would include up to

13 different counties, including Clearfield, Jefferson and Elk counties. In the plan, the multi-county region would be marketed to tourists nationally as the "The Wilds of Pennsylvania."

Peterson said that he hoped that the meeting could serve as a discussion for the future of the region, which spans from Venango to Tioga County. He said that the potential in the region is unlimited, but that the region has not yet scratched the surface of its potential.

Peterson: Regional plan to be marketed as 'The Wilds of Pennsylvania'

Peterson proposed that the counties band together to market themselves so that they could have the same kind of success that has been seen in areas such as the Great Smokey Mountains in Tennessee or the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia.

"We have all of these assets. There's not a county that doesn't have its own assets, with beauty and history," Peterson said. "Individually, this area is nice. But collectively, this could be a place where people come for a week or a long weekend. People go to regions, not counties."

"This is not a criticism of any of your agencies," Peterson said to area tourist officials at the meeting. "You

inherited a model. But the model for attracting people to counties has never been successful."

Peterson believes that bringing the different counties together would be the greatest benefit to the region, but also that it would be the greatest challenge.

"The problem is, how does a federal figure get people locally to get on the same page?" he said. "I'm going to promise to try to bring money here, but groups here are going to have to pledge to work together. We have to get on the same team or become the same team."

Peterson proposed that county leaders allot more than 50 percent of money taken from hotel taxes toward the project. He said that he would urge state legislators to offer their support and that he would commit himself to trying to secure money from the nation's capitol.

"We have never had the kind of focus from the state of Pennsylvania on this part of the state before," Pe-



PETERSON

terson said, explaining that this was the first time he had ever seen a marketing emphasis put on this region of the state by the state's administration. "The more we structure this for success, the more the state is going to invest. We have to figure out how to pool our resources."

Deputy Secretary for Tourism Mickey Rowley explained the "Wilds of Pennsylvania" theme that his department has been developing. Rowley said that his department came up with the slogan to describe the rural atmosphere of the region, which includes the Allegheny National Forest, the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon, the Elk herds of Elk and Cameron counties and the Kinzua Dam near Warren.

Peterson asked for tourism officials to give him their feedback on the plan and for county commissioners to consider their support for the plan.

"Sooner is better. When this sum-

mer is over, we need to have a game plan in place," Peterson said.

Commissioners in attendance included Rex Read and Mark McCracken from Clearfield County; Paul Corbin, James McIntyre and Jeff Pisarcik from Jefferson County; and June Sorg from Elk County.

"I think it's a great idea," Read said. "When you consider what is available in the region and the potential, it's really staggering."

"It's a very interesting concept," McCracken said. "The concept giving the region an identity sounds very positive. There is a lot of potential there."

All said they believed the coordination of the individual counties and departments into a larger region would be the most difficult task to overcome.

"The greatest challenge is getting past the mindset of looking at little areas and thinking in broader terms," Corbin said.